

Daily activity pattern and diet of a population of the Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis*, during summer in the United Arab Emirates

by Peter Cunningham

Abstract: A study of 20 *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis* individuals during May and June 1999 in the United Arab Emirates, indicate that they are diurnal and emerge early in the morning with ambient temperatures around 30°C. Most time (% daylight hours) above ground is spent basking (13.8%), followed by foraging (4.6%) and then den clearing (0.4%). Individuals retreat underground for most of the day (81.2%) with only 18.8% of daylight hours spent on above ground activities. The lizard's retreat underground with ambient temperatures around 40°C. *Pennisetum divisum* and *Stipagrostis plumosa* are extensively utilised by *U. a. microlepis*. A faecal analysis indicates the lack of insects in the diet, with only 1.2% of pellets containing insect remains.

Kurzfassung: Eine Untersuchung an 20 Individuen der Dornschwanzagame der *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis* im Mai und Juni 1999 in den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten ergab, dass die Art tagaktiv ist und am Morgen bei Temperaturen um 30°C aktiv wird. Die meiste der auf der Erdoberfläche verbrachten Zeit wird mit Sonnenbaden verbracht (13.8%), gefolgt von Nahrungssuche (4.6%) und Höhlenbau (0.4%). Den größten Teil des Tages (81.2%) verbringen die Tiere unter der Erde, und nur 18.8% der Aktivitäten werden auf der Erdoberfläche ausgeführt. Bei Temperaturen um 40°C weichen die Tiere unter die Erdoberfläche aus. Die Pflanzen *Pennisetum divisum* und *Stipagrostis plumosa* werden bei der Nahrungsaufnahme intensiv genutzt, und eine Kotanalyse zeigt die herbivore Natur der Art; nur 1.2% der Kotballen enthielt Reste von Insekten.

Key words: *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis*, Spiny-Tailed Lizard, Arabia, Middle East, United Arab Emirates, daily activity pattern, diet.

Introduction

Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis (Blandford, 1874) belongs to the Family Agamidae and is an impressive heavily built ground dwelling lizard with a spiny club-like tail. The total length of mature individuals ranges between 30 and 60 cm. The body colouration varies throughout the day, initially a dark greyish hue directly after emergence to a pale white or sulphurous yellow colour during the heat of day, except for the head, which remains darker in colour. The subspecies *microlepis* occurs throughout the Gulf coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Iraq and Jordan (ARNOLD 1986, LEVITON et al. 1992) and is a common and widespread species in the United Arab Emirates (BROWN 1982, BAHÄ EL DIN 1996, HORNBY 1996, JONGBLOED 1997).

While studies on the thermal ecology of *Uromastyx* have been conducted in North Africa (GRENOT & LOIRAT 1973, GRENOT 1976), relatively little comparable work has been done